

Runyan's

Daughter Debra grew up learning the business

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William Runyan had several children, including Emerson and Gerald Runyan who both carried on the jewelry business.

Paul's father, Emerson, opened his own store in Camas in 1946. Gerald continued the Vancouver business, Runyan's

Jewelers, now owned by Steve Runyan and his son, Eric, at 900 Washington St.

At 19 Paul, who was newly married to Barbara, established a store in the corner of a pharmacy in the small town of Bingen in 1954.

Even though payment often came in the form of chickens and eggs, Paul operated his Bingen store until 1970 when he sold it and became a partner in his father's Camas jewelry shop. He took over that business in 1977 when his father retired. Af-

ter the store in Bingen closed, Paul opened a storefront in nearby White Salmon in 1978. He and Barbara operate both stores and will continue to run the White Salmon location. But at the end of their fiscal year on Sept. 30, Debra will take over the Camas store.

Like her father, Debra grew up around the business. Her responsibilities began at age 12 and she gradually developed an understanding of the business and the mechanics of time pieces. The store often took old clocks in trade and many of the mechanisms were turned over to Debra and her three sisters to tinker with.

"We could take it apart and put it back together," Debra said. Although she is still learning the fine points of the business, much of her existing knowledge was ingrained through a lifetime of exposure.

"Being in a small town, you offer a little bit of everything. Since I grew up with it, there is a lot that I automatically know," Debra said.

Debra, 36, has already begun personalizing the store. She is scheduled to take classes to become a licensed gemologist and will be able to custom-order

stones over the Internet. The store will feature estate sales and designer jewelry by Magnus John Homestead. Much of what her parents built, including the gift merchandise sales and the service philosophy, will remain.

A partnership

Twenty-seven years ago, Barbara agreed to work in the Camas store for three months until Paul became settled. She has worked six-day weeks ever since.

The Runyans have worked side-by-side. Barbara does the books and Paul, with a loupe — a jeweler's eyepiece — to his eye much of the time, has fixed the community's watches and ordered jewelry.

Unlike chain jewelry stores, Runyan's has few off-price sales. The family takes pride in offering consistent value and has kept prices low enough to compete with large stores and tax-free shopping in Oregon.

In retirement, Paul will continue to serve on the board of Camas-based Riverview Savings Bank, a position he has held since 1978. He is an avid pilot and airplane builder and will continue to operate his 100-acre tree farm.

Barbara's plans haven't solidified yet.

"I really won't know what I'm going to do until I walk out that door," Barbara said. "It's been a long time."

Both are pleased that Debra stepped forward to take over the store.

"I just told all my kids that I was ready to retire and asked if anybody was interested," Paul said. "We wanted to keep it in the family."

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